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ABSTRACT

Alaska's geographic position at the crossroads between East and West and heavy trade with Japan have sparked widespread interest among Alaskans in education about Pacific Rim countries. In 1985 the Alaska Sister Schools Network was formed by the Alaska Department of Education and the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, to create opportunities for Alaskan students to experience the cultural and economic perspectives of their Pacific Rim neighbors. By 1989, 143 of Alaska's 543 schools had participated in the network. Most partnerships have been with schools in Japan (83), followed by the People's Republic of China (29), Australia (21), New Zealand (6), the Soviet Union (6), Korea (3), and the Philippines (2). Three levels of partnership encompass: (1) initial acquaintance, correspondence, and exchange of materials; (2) curriculum development that focuses on the culture, language, and economies of partner countries; and (3) actual visits by students, staff, and parents. In preparing curricula, network developers sought to feature comparative aspects of gender between cultures and worked with the state Office of Equity Education to meet state mandates concerning sex fairness. Resource kits providing 3-week units of study were developed that integrate issues of sex equity into experiential education about Japan, China, the Philippines, Australia, and the Soviet Union. (SV)

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Implementing Global Studies Curriculum through International School-to-School Partnerships

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One would hardly expect to find hotbeds of international communication in the small towns and remote villages of Alaska. Yet a growing number of schools across this vast state are demonstrating that all students, regardless of cultural background and language, can have a lively relationship with Pacific Rim neighbors. From Sapporo to Savoonga, from Harbin to Fairbanks, cross-cultural dialogues are part of a promising network for educational change.

Alaska stands at an international crossroads between East and West. Booming interest in the political and business interests of the Pacific Rim nations—Japan receives more than 70% of Alaska's exports—have spawned a widespread desire among Alaskans to educate the young about Alaska's international neighbors. Governor Steve Cowper's state priorities for the rest of the decade place considerable emphasis on the development of effective international educational programs.

The Alaska Sister Schools Network was formed in 1985 by the Alaska Department of Education and the University of Alaska Fairbanks to create opportunities for Alaskan students to experience more directly the cultural and economic perspectives of their Pacific Rim neighbors. As the education grapevine spread word of the network, overwhelming interest in the program developed. In addition to the state department and the university, which are continuing to manage the network, many individuals representing the state's executive and legislative branches of government and private industry now contribute to the management and growth of the network.

As of January 1989, 143 of Alaska's 543 schools had participated in the Alaska Sister Schools Network—more schools (and by far a higher percentage of schools) than have taken part in any comparable program in any other state.

The Alaska Sister Schools Network was launched by the public schools of Alaska and Hokkaido, Japan. To date, the major focus of the network has been on partnerships between Alaskan schools and schools in Japan (83), the People's Republic of China (29), and Australia (21). Schools in New Zealand (6), Korea (3), the Philippines (2), and the Soviet Union (6) have also joined the network.

Network organizers wish to go beyond the "pen-pal" approach. Specifically, the network encourages three levels of partnership: 1) initial acquaintance, correspondence (often by means of electronic mail), and exchange of materials; 2) curriculum development that focuses on the culture, language, and economies of partner countries; and 3) actual visits by students, staff members, and parents.

In some partnerships, teachers from both schools have decided to focus on a single project. In one southeastern Alaska junior high school, for example, the students created and assembled a quilt, with each square providing a lesson in Alaskan history or geography. The students sent the quilt to their sister school in Japan with the agreement that something similar would be returned by the Japanese students.

In many schools, students have produced videotapes featuring the geography and scenery of their communities to trade with Asian counterparts. Short stories, poems, and artwork are regularly exchanged. Students in one Alaskan school estimate that they have forwarded more than 200 pounds of

materials to their Japanese counterparts during the last eight months. Food and everyday household articles also wing their way back and forth across the Pacific.

On both sides, the experience has helped to foster appreciation for language differences and has helped to improve communication skills. In Kotlik, a village of 270 residents in western Alaska, all correspondence from the sister school arrives in Japanese. These letters and stories are sent upriver to St. Mary's (population 650), where the spouse of the city clerk is a Japanese-American who translates them. On the island community of Sitka, eight people who regularly travel to Japan act as couriers as well as translators. The seventh-graders of Sitka received more than 300 letters in a single year from their new friends in Japan.

Network coordinators assist individual schools in developing units of study by providing a regularly updated resource guide that includes general information on international communication, global education, and international exchange programs for students and teachers. Background articles for teachers, ideas for lesson plans, photocopied handouts for students, and news from the popular press—all of which are often difficult to find in remote Alaskan villages—are included in the resource guide.

Joining the network is not difficult. When it receives an inquiry or request for information, the state department sends a simple application form to the interested school, asking for such basic information as whether the school is urban or rural, what the cultural background and language proficiency of the community is, and whether the community has any existing "sister city" affiliation. The application and other network materials have been translated into Asian languages for use in schools across the Pacific.

Project coordinators review the competed applications and select the best match for each school. The Alaskan principal takes the lead in sending a formal letter of introduction and invitation to the principal of the partner school. Once the first round of diplomatic greetings between the administrators has taken place, classroom teachers and students take control.

Curriculum Development

Responding to the limited availability of curriculum materials on Asia for elementary and secondary students, network coordinators have launched a second phase of the project. While material on Asian culture is generally available in the United States, very little appropriately connects Alaska with the Pacific Basin. In preparing curricula, the developers sought to feature comparative aspects of gender between cultures. Through this focus the State of Alaska Office of Equity Education joined in full partnership to develop these materials. To better understand this unusual connection between Asian studies, curriculum, development, and equity education one must first appreciate Alaska's legal mandate.

Alaska's sex equity law, which prohibits sex discrimination in public school education, was passed by the Alaska Legislature in 1981. The law has been cited as one of the strongest state sex discrimination laws in the nation. This is in part due to the fact that the regulations require school districts to establish written procedures for

1. the biennial training of certified personnel in the recognition of sex bias in instructional materials and in instructional techniques which may be used to overcome the effects of sex bias,

2. the biennial training of guidance and counseling staff in the recognition of bias in counseling materials and in techniques which may be used to overcome the effects of sex bias,

3. the review of textbooks and instructional materials for evidence of sex bias, and

4. the replacement or supplementation of materials which exhibit bias.

Since the implementation of these regulations, referred to as Chapter 18, the Department of Education has introduced pertinent issues to Alaskan districts through on-site in-service training and numerous conference presentations in the area of sex discrimination. The most effective and long-lasting staff development occurs at the local level when teachers and administrators can personally and actively apply new theories and skills on the educational practices. In 1986, the Department of Education used Title IV Sex Desegregation funds for the development of a series of equity teacher training modules. These modules, along with other materials provided by the Department and other sources, help bolster the creation of a cadre of equity trainers within each district. Over the last two years, educators within Alaska have developed modules relating directly to the curriculum content areas and the state's model curriculum guides. The modules were developed and written with the practical needs of educators in mind and are simple and direct in their format. The related readings and materials are included in each module.

Modules which are now available include:

- Women in American History (Elementary)
- Women in American History (Secondary)
- Social Studies (4-6)
- Linguistic Bias (K-12)
- Science (K-8)
- Mathematics (Elementary)
- Fine Arts (Elementary)
- Foreign Languages
- Health
- Physical Education
- Teaching about Japan
- Teaching about China
- Teaching about the Philippines
- Teaching about Australia
- Cross-Cultural Equity
- Computer Equity

The specific units developed for the Sister Schools Network, *Rising Sun/Northern Star, Half the Sky, Pearl of the Orient Sea,* and *Under the Southern Cross,* each have successfully incorporated Asian studies and gender equity.

Rising Sun/Northern Star

Within the context of a comparative study of life in Japan and Alaska, *Rising Sun/Northern Star* is an instructional program designed to introduce students to issues related to sex equity and economics. The Alaska Department of Education initiated this collaborative effort with the Alaska Council on Economic Education and the University of Alaska Fairbanks. It represents a dynamic drive to produce relevant materials for Alaskan schools involved with Pacific Rim studies and the Japanese Sister Schools Network. It is an effective example of how to integrate the issues of sex equity directly into curriculum at both the elementary and secondary level.

The program consists of two sets of lessons—one for students grades 4–6 and one for students in grades 9–12. It promotes an interdisciplinary, experiential approach to teaching and learning. The program or kit is housed in a large, sturdy box making travel to rural Alaska easily manageable. It contains a wide variety of hands-on materials, including videotapes, costumes, Japanese magazines, and maps. The kit was piloted by eight Alaskan teachers in spring of 1987 and revised based on their practical suggestions. "By comparing the two cultures, sex bias becomes obvious and easy to address and talk about," one wrote of his experience with the kit. A detailed teacher's guide lays out daily lesson plans designed as a three-week unit. It is cross curricular by nature covering skills in language arts, social studies, fine arts, foreign language, computer education, and science.

Women Hold Up Half the Sky

Half the Sky is a resource kit intended to expand Alaskan students' awareness of sex bias and stereotyping by examining the changing roles of men and women in the People's Republic of China. In probably no quarter of the globe have traditional beliefs about the relationships between men and women, children and parents, and the citizen and the state been so dramatically altered in so short a time as in mainland China.

Like its companion kit, *Rising Sun/Northern Star, Half the Sky* promotes an interdisciplinary, experiential approach to teaching and learning. Wherever possible, Chinese resources have been used for student readings and handouts. The kit contains a wide variety of hands-on materials, most of which were purchased directly in Heilongjiang, Alaska's sister province. The kit includes calligraphy charts, pens, ink pads, hats, slides, scrolls, kites, and a number of fiction and nonfiction books on China. A Resource Guide accompanies each kit, providing additional background readings that may be difficult to obtain in rural Alaska. The program or kit is housed in a durable, well-marked box making statewide travel manageable. It consists of two sets of lessons—one for students

grades 4–6 and one for students in grades 9–12, and can be scheduled to fit into local curriculum plans. It is multidisciplinary and can be used in language arts, social studies, fine arts, math, and foreign languages.

The developers hope that the students using the kit will share their sense of excitement in discovering at least a small part of one of the great countries of the world—great in size, in population, and in challenges to be met—and that this knowledge will help students to better understand another great unexplored country—their own potential as men and women.

Additional kits that have been developed include *Pearl of the Orient Sea: The Changing Roles of Men and Women in the Philippines and Alaska* and *Under the Southern Cross: Men's and Women's Roles in Australia*. Currently, a fifth kit in the series which focuses on the Soviet Union is under production.

Student/Faculty Exchanges

In the vast interior of Alaska, in the village of Russian Mission, the entire community of 245 people gathered in the school gymnasium for a celebration of "Japan Week," the culmination of a year's study by the school's primary students. The participants shared rice cakes, sushi, and Japanese tea, as the children read haiku poems and described the displays of Japanese artwork and letters that they had received from their sister school in Japan.

On a Tuesday morning in Fairbanks, Alaska, Akira Takayanagi, principal of Toyozono Elementary School in Sapporo, Japan, received a bouquet and a welcome in Japanese from a second-grader at Weller Elementary School. With a broad smile, he ceremoniously bowed. Takayanagi's October 1987 visit to Toyozono Elementary's sister school in Alaska was the first of three exchange visits between the schools during the 1987–1988 school year. His six-day stay included seeing the sights and meeting the people of Fairbanks; it ended with an emotional, student-led farewell ceremony at the airport.

Actual exchange visits between sister schools by school staff members, parents, and students face the obvious hurdle of expense. Yet many schools have made such visits a priority and are finding ways to overcome the obstacle of limited resources.

During the fall of 1986 students, teachers, and the principal of Takikawa Kogyo High School raised sufficient funds to initiate the first exchange visit within the network. That visit—to Takikawa Kogyo High School's sister school in Togiak, a Yupik Eskimo community of 554 residents—was a resounding success and planted the seeds for a reciprocal visit. During the following year, the Togiak school raised more than $20,000 through a grant, school district support, and fundraising activities. In June 1987, 17 students, two teachers, and the principal traveled to Takikawa, Japan. The late Dorian Ross, who served as principal in Togiak, summarized the experience:

> I have seldom, if ever, seen a student-to-student experience as basic and powerful as the Togiak-Takikawa exchange. Here is our great opportunity for young Alaskans to understand their Pacific neighbors and to create cultural ties with those to whom they already have economic ties. If it can happen here, there is great hope for peaceful, productive, and lasting educational exchanges and friendship between Alaska and our Pacific Rim Neighbors.

The Alaska Sister Schools Network demonstrates the success that can be achieved when schools combine relevant curriculum with contemporary national, state, and community interests. Moreover, Alaskan students are exploring their state's natural economic ties to other Pacific countries, so that these young people can take their places as the investors, consumers, and trade negotiators of the future.

An almost magical excitement has arisen in many of the sister schools, as eager students seek to learn more about the language and culture of their Pacific neighbors. This energy and enthusiasm promises to carry Alaska's newly formed Pacific Rim partnerships far beyond the classroom walls.